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Aug. 1899 —

DOES SLAVERY CHRISTIANIZE THE NEGRO?

4265.364

BY REV. T. W. HIGGINSON.

AMERICAN slavery, say many of its advocates, is a great missionary institution, ordained by Providence for the civilization and instruction of the heathen.

Now, this experiment has been tried already in the Southern States of this country for some two centuries; and if we judge foreign missions by their fruits, we must certainly admit the same test as valid here. Two questions then suggest themselves, which cover the whole ground.

1. *What is the result of the enterprise thus far, as seen in the moral condition of the "reclaimed heathen" now in slavery at the south?*

In answer, we introduce the following testimony, confining ourselves to the words of southern men: —

Committee of Synod of South Carolina and Georgia, in 1833. "Who would credit it, that in these years of benevolent and successful missionary effort, in this Christian republic, there are over two millions of human beings *in the condition of heathen*, and in some respects in a worse condition? From long-continued and close observation, we believe that their moral and religious condition is such that they may justly be regarded as the heathen of this Christian country."

Kentucky Union's Circular to the Ministers of the Gospel in Kentucky, 1834. "After making all reasonable allowances, our colored population can be considered, at the best, but *semi-heathen*."

Rev. C. C. Jones's Sermon, published at Savannah, 1831. "A nation of *heathen* in our very midst."

Rev. C. C. Jones's Catechism, preface, p. 4. "Their depravity, their spiritual ignorance and destitution, are amazingly and awfully great."

Hon. C. C. Pinckney, Address before S. C. Agricultural Society,

Charleston, 1829, 2d. edition, pp. 10, 12. "There needs no stronger illustration of the doctrine of depravity than the state of human nature on plantations in general." * * * "Their advance in years is but a progression to the higher grades of iniquity."

Rev. Dr. Dalcho, "Practical Considerations," &c., Charleston, 1823, p. 6. "Ignorant and indolent by nature, improvident and depraved by habit, and destitute of moral principle, as they generally appear to be."

C. W. Gooch, Esq., Prize Essay on Agriculture in Virginia. "There seems to be almost an entire absence of moral principle among the mass of our colored population."

The Maryville (Tennessee) Intelligencer of October 4, 1835, says of the slaves of the south-west, that their "condition through time will be second only to that of the wretched creatures in hell."

But the chief authority on this subject is the work of the Rev. C. C. Jones, of Savannah, Ga., printed in that city in 1842, on the Religious Instruction of Slaves — a book of unimpeachable authority and great thoroughness, written by a firm defender of slavery, and yet forming an anti-slavery document to which Uncle Tom's Cabin is feeble; for this is fact, instead of fiction founded on fact. Nor have we ever read, in the reports of any missionary society, a description of more hopeless human degradation.

"When the charge of the intellectual and moral degradation of the negroes is preferred against us," says the author candidly, p. 107, "we are inclined to put the best face on affairs, knowing that this is the *darkest feature and the most vulnerable point.*"

"We have indeed assisted in sending missionaries to the heathen thousands of miles from us, * * * in founding theological seminaries, * * * in having the gospel preached in our prisons; * * * we have been printing Bibles and tracts; * * * but what have we done publicly, systematically, and perseveringly for the negroes, in order that they may also enjoy the gospel of Christ? Why are they, as a class, overlooked by us in our benevolent regards and efforts." — P. 167.

"That the negroes are in a degraded state is a fact, so far as my knowledge extends, universally conceded." — P. 145.

"Such a general corruption of morals as would blast the reputation of any white community is known to exist among them; and

yet how unaffected are we by it? Indeed, the habit of our mind is to consider them as *in a state of moral degradation.* * * * Whatever is idle, dissolute, criminal, and worthless attaches to them." — P. 104.

Mr. Jones explains the origin of this. First, there is almost no religious instruction among the families of slaves.

"But how much religious instruction do the young negroes receive from their masters, who sustain the relation of parents to them?" * * * "How many ministers assemble the colored children of their congregations for instruction?" * * * "The negro children cannot be 'hearers of the law,' for oral instruction is but sparingly afforded to the mass of them; and on the other hand, they cannot 'search the Scriptures,' for a knowledge of letters they have not, and legally cannot obtain." "The remarks on the religious instruction of children apply with equal force to adults." — Pp. 114, 7.

True, many belong to the church; but see what follows: —

"I have heard the remark made, by men whose standing and office in the churches afforded them abundant opportunity for observation, that the more they have had to do with colored members, the less confidence they have been compelled to place in their Christian professions."

He then explains the prevailing vices: —

"*Violations of the marriage contract.* — The divine institution of marriage depends for its perpetuity, sacredness, and value largely upon the protection given it by the law of the land. Negro marriages are neither recognized nor protected by law. The negroes receive no instruction on the nature, sacredness, or perpetuity of the institution; at any rate, they are far from being duly impressed with these things." — Pp. 131–132.

"*Uncleanness.* — This sin may be considered as universal." "They are proverbially thieves." "Their veracity is nominal." "Whenever opportunity is given, they will practise imposition." "Immense quantities of ardent spirits are sold in the Southern States

to the negroes by retailing shops established for the express purpose of negro trading, wherever such trade may be found." — Pp. 134–138.

"We are surprised," says Mr. Jones, "to find Christianity in absolute conjunction with a people, and yet conferring so few benefits." * * * "To say that they fare as well as their masters does not settle the question; for great numbers of their masters have very few or no religious privileges at all." — P. 177.

Finally, he concludes, "Ignorance, religious ignorance, so far from being any safety, is the very marrow of our sin against this people, and the very rock of our danger." — P. 212.

Thus testifies Rev. C. C. Jones, a man evidently sincere and earnest, and who has apparently made more exertion for the religious instruction of the African race in the Southern States than any other for half a century. And what are we to think of a missionary institution whose results are thus stated, after two centuries of experiment, by the very leader and chief laborer among the missionaries?

We have no space for an investigation into the condition of Africa. We commonly forget that the coast of Africa, as we see it, has been desolated for ages by the slave trade, and that the condition of the natives is of course degraded. The bright side of this question is exhibited in an article in Putnam's Magazine for October, 1854. But never have we seen a picture of the state of morals in the wildest African tribe which filled us with such indignation and such pity as the picture of "Religious Instruction among the Negroes" by the southern slaveholding divine. This degradation is worse than the other, by as much as a nominally Christian barbarism is necessarily worse than mere heathen barbarism.

But there is another and more formidable question, suggested by some terrible hints of this same witness, in the latter portion of his statement.

2. *What is the effect of this missionary institution upon the missionaries themselves?*

Rev. C. C. Jones. "I do not hesitate to say that the influence of the negroes on the general intelligence and morality of the whites is not good. There are those who deny this. I differ with them, and am happy in believing that the majority of our fellow-citizens are with me. We are so accustomed to sin in the negroes that our

sensibilities are blunted. * * * Planters will generally confess that the management of negroes is not only attended with trouble and vexation from time to time, but with provocations to sin. Masters and mistresses have their trials. And the kind of influence which the negroes exert over our children and youth, when permitted to associate with them, is well known to all careful and observing parents." — P. 216.

So said Jefferson: "The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals uncontaminated" [in the midst of slavery.]

Judge Tucker, of Virginia, said, in 1801, "I say nothing of the baneful effects of slavery on our moral character, because you know I have long been sensible of this point."

Judge Nichols, of Kentucky, in a speech in 1837, said, "The deliberate convictions of my most matured consideration are, that the institution of slavery is a most serious injury to the habits, manners, and morals of our white population; that it leads to sloth, indolence, dissipation, and vice."

Judge Summers, of Virginia, said, in a speech in 1832, in almost the same words, "A slave population produces the most pernicious effects upon the manners, habits, and character of those among whom it exists."

The Presbyterian synod of South Carolina and Georgia said, in their Report of 1834, "Those only who have the management of these servants know what the hardening effect of it is upon their own feelings towards them."

And that fearful revelation by John Randolph on the floor of Congress: "Where are the trophies of this infernal traffic? The handcuff, the manacle, the bloodstained cowhide! What man is worse received in society for being a hard master? Who denies the hand of sister or daughter to such monsters?"

But enough — enough of the dark results of this "missionary institution" upon all whom it concerns. We have only spoken of it in the words of southern men; we will not trust ourselves to use any others. We will only tell a story, and come to an end.

It is said that a century has passed since one of the finest islands of the Indian Ocean was visited by three young Englishmen, who, moved by the loveliness of Nature there and the degradation of man, pledged themselves with youthful ardor to make it their home henceforward, and uplift its friendly inhabitants from their igno-

rance and their sin. They began their work well; but soon, alas! the enervating influence of that tropical air began to soothe soul and senses; the most warlike chiefs offered them their power, the wealthiest their luxury, and the fairest maidens their virtue. Need we tell the issue? Half a century afterwards the island was again visited by English cruisers. The children of these young adventurers were now the princes of the island; and none of their subjects were so hopelessly depraved as they.

May God enlighten the minds of those who would urge the renewal of the same suicidal experiment beneath the same soft southern atmosphere, but upon a different shore.

APPENDIX.

Some years ago, the Rev. Bishop Meade, an Episcopal clergyman of Virginia, published a book of sermons and tracts for masters and slaves. It was printed at Winchester, Va., by John Hieskell.

In the preface to the work, the bishop remarks: —

"The editor of this volume offers it to all masters and mistresses in our Southern States, with the anxious wish and devout prayer that it may prove a blessing to themselves and their households."

In this book are two sermons from this text, to be read by masters to their slaves: "Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free."

As these sermons are so perfect a delineation of slaveholding godliness, some extracts will not here be out of place. They are addressed to a congregation of slaves.

After showing the slaves that they are all in the condition where God would have them, and that they were made for the use and service of their masters, he proceeds: —

"When people die, we know of but two places they have to go to; and one is heaven, the other hell. Now, heaven is a place of great happiness, which God has prepared for all that are good, where they shall enjoy rest from their labors. And hell is a place of great torment and misery, where all wicked people will be shut up with the devil and other evil spirits, and be punished forever, because they will not serve God. If, therefore, we would have our souls saved by Christ, if we would escape hell, and obtain heaven, we must set about doing what he requires of us; that is, to serve God. Your own poor circumstances in this life ought to put *you* particularly upon this and taking care of your souls. * * * Almighty God hath been pleased to make you slaves here, and to give you nothing but labor and poverty in this world, which you are obliged to submit to, as it is

his will that it should be so. And think within yourselves what a terrible thing it would be, after all your labors and sufferings in this life, to be turned into hell in the next life, and, after wearing out your bodies in service here, to go into a far worse slavery when this is over, and your poor souls be delivered over into the possession of the devil, to become his slaves forever in hell, without any hope of ever getting free from it! If, therefore, you would be God's freemen in heaven, you must strive to be good and serve him here on earth. Your bodies, you know, are not your own; they are at the disposal of those you belong to; but your precious souls are still your own, which nothing can take from you, if it be not your own fault. Consider well, then, that, if you lose your souls by leading idle, wicked lives here, you have got nothing by it in this world, and you have lost your all in the next. For your idleness and wickedness are generally found out, and your bodies suffer for it here; and what is far worse, if you do not repent and amend, your unhappy souls will suffer for it hereafter.

"Having thus shown you the chief duties you owe to your great Master in heaven, I now come to lay before you the duties you owe to your masters and mistresses here upon earth. And for this you have one general rule, that you ought always to carry in your minds; and that is, to *do all service for them as if you did it for God himself.* Poor creatures! you little consider when you are idle and neglectful of your masters' business, when you steal, and waste, and hurt any of their substance, when you are saucy and impudent, when you are telling them lies and deceiving them, or when you prove stubborn and sullen, and will not do the work you are set about without stripes and vexation, — you do not consider, I say, that what faults you are guilty of towards your masters and mistresses are faults done against God himself, who hath set your masters and mistresses over you in his own stead, and expects that you will do for them just as you would do for him. And pray do not think that I want to deceive you when I tell you that your *masters and mistresses are God's overseers*, and that, if you are faulty towards them, God himself will punish you severely for it in the next world, unless you *repent* of it, and strive to make amends by your faithfulness and diligence for the time to come; for God himself hath declared the same.

"And in the first place, you are to be obedient and subject to your masters in all things. * * * And Christian ministers are commanded to 'exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering them again, or gainsaying.' * * * You are to be faithful and honest to your masters and mistresses, not purloining or wasting their goods or substance, but showing all good fidelity in all things. * * * Do not your masters, under God, provide for you? And how shall they be able to do this, to feed and to clothe you, unless you take honest care of every thing that belongs to them? Remember that God requires this of you; and if you are not afraid of suffering for it here, you cannot escape the vengeance of Almighty God, who will judge between you and your masters, and make you pay severely, in the next world, for all the injustice you do them here. And though you could manage so cunningly as to escape the eyes and hands of man, yet think what a dreadful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, who is able to cast both soul and body into hell!" * * *

And again, on page 116:—

"'*All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them;*' that is, do by all mankind just as you would desire they should do by you, if you were in their place, and they in yours.

"Now, to suit this rule to your particular circumstances. Suppose you were masters and mistresses, and had servants under you, would you not desire that your servants should do their business *faithfully* and *honestly* as well when your back was turned as while you were looking over them? Would you not expect that they should take notice of what you said to them, that they should behave themselves with respect towards you and yours, and be as careful of every thing belonging to you as you would be yourselves? You are servants: do, therefore, as you would wish to be done by, and you will be both good servants to your masters, and good servants to God, who requires this of you, and will reward you well for it, if you do it for the sake of conscience, in obedience to his commands. * * * Take care that you do not fret, or murmur, or grumble at your condition; for this will not only make your life uneasy, but will greatly offend Almighty God. Consider that it is not yourselves, it is not the people you belong to, it is not the men that have brought you to it, but it is the will of God, who hath by his providence made you servants, because, no doubt, he knew that condition would be best for you in this world, and help you the better towards heaven, if you would but do your duty in it. So that any discontent at your not being free, or rich, or great, as you see some others, is quarrelling with your heavenly Master, and finding fault with God himself. * * * There is only one circumstance which may appear grievous that I shall now take notice of; and that is CORRECTION.

"Now, when *correction* is given you, you either deserve it, or you do not deserve it. But whether you really deserve it or not, it is your duty, and Almighty God requires, that you bear it patiently. You may, perhaps, think that this is hard doctrine; but if you consider it rightly, you must needs think otherwise of it. Suppose, then, that you deserve correction; you cannot but say that it is just and right you should meet with it. Suppose you do not, or at least you do not deserve so much or so severe a correction for the fault you have committed; you perhaps have escaped a great many more, and are at least paid for all. Or suppose you are quite innocent of what is laid to your charge, and suffer wrongfully in that particular thing; is it not possible you may have done some other bad thing which was never discovered, and that Almighty God, who saw you doing it, would not let you escape without punishment one time or another? And ought you not in such a case to give glory to him, and be thankful that he would rather punish you in this life for your wickedness than destroy your souls for it in the next life? But suppose that even this was not the case, (a case hardly to be imagined,) and that you have by no means, known or unknown, deserved the correction you suffered; there is this great comfort in it, that if you bear it patiently, and leave your cause in the hands of God, he will reward you for it in heaven, and the punishment you suffer unjustly here shall turn to your exceeding great glory hereafter."

Published for gratuitous distribution, at the Office of the AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY, *No.* 138 *Nassau Street, New York. Also to be had at the Anti-Slavery Offices, No.* 21 *Cornhill, Boston, and No.* 31 *North Fifth Street, Philadelphia.*

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